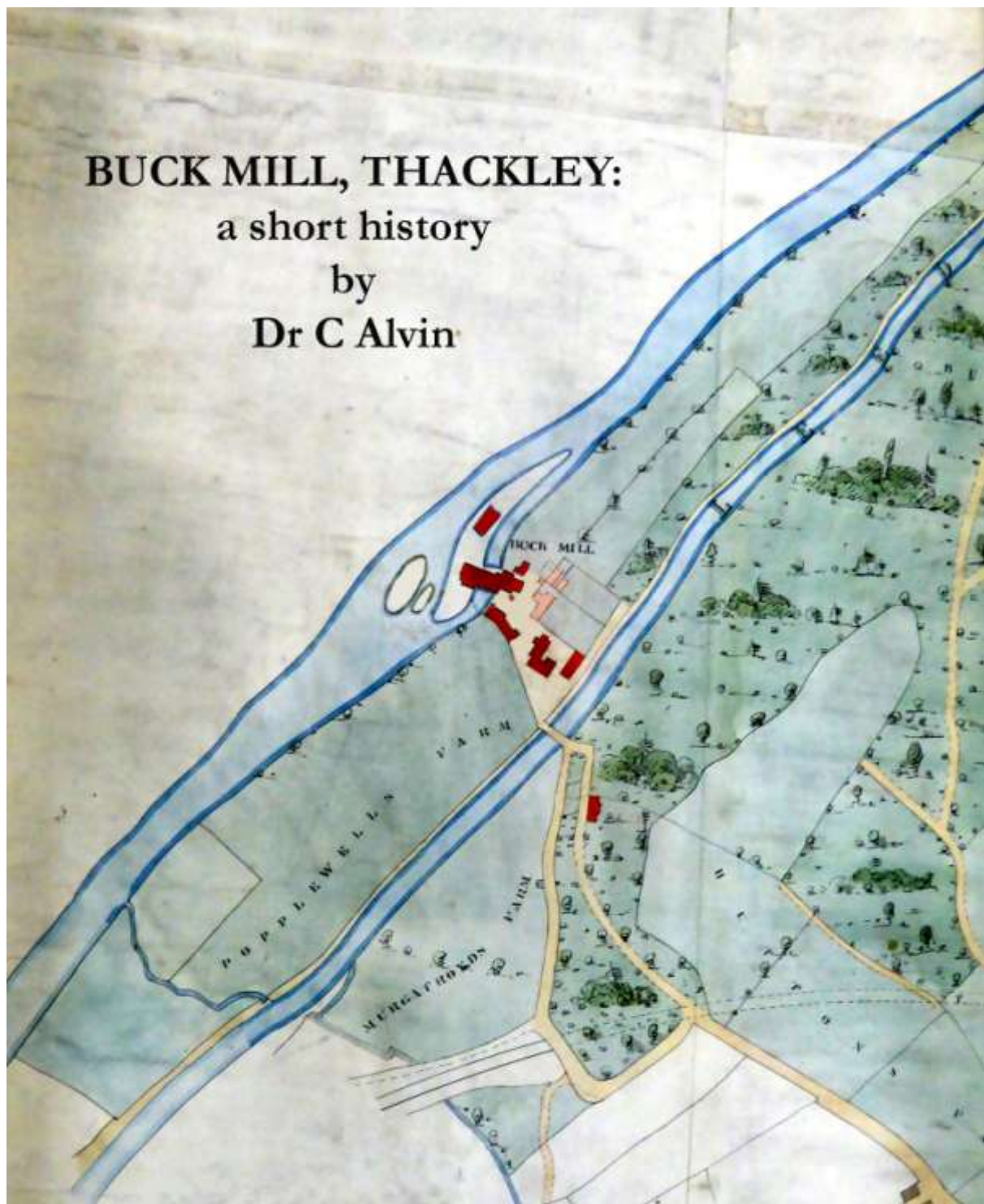


BUCK MILL, THACKLEY:

a short history

by

Dr C Alvin



BUCK MILL, THACKLEY: a short history by Dr Christine Alvin

INTRODUCTION

In a deed dated 1213, Nigel de Plumpton, Lord of the Manor of Idle, was given permission to construct a mill dam across the River Aire between Baildon and Idle. The Plumptons were vassals (dependents) of the more powerful de Lacey family, who owned the land on the Baildon side of the river. In this legal document William de Lacey granted Nigel and his heirs the right to fix this dam to the mill for an annual payment of twelve pence, as a recognition of the de Lacey's ownership of the northern, or Baildon, side of the Aire.

This was the mill that for several hundred years was known as Idle Mill, and which eventually became known as Buck Mill. It was highly influential in the way that Thackley developed, because it was a focal point in the lives of many people for almost seven centuries.

EARLY YEARS: Before Industrialisation

The mill began as a Soke mill, where corn was ground. As a feature of the feudal system by which the country and its people were governed, the soke mill was the only place where everyone who grew any kind of grain had to take it to be ground ready for use. It was the manorial mill, where the lord of the manor charged a fee for the services of his miller. As a columnist in the Shipley Times in 1915 put it: *it was "the centre of corn milling for all the farmers around: the people of the neighbourhood would bring their corn in sacks, borne on the backs of pack horses, along the ancient track ways, for grinding at the mill, and return home with the flour."*

Water mills have been used in Britain since at least the Roman occupation. Before the introduction of steam engines, water mills and windmills provided the main source of power for grinding corn and for industrial processes. Water powered mills remained in use well into the nineteenth century, and a few are still in use today.

When the Mill at Thackley was first built it was sited at the best point of the river for providing water power for the mill wheels. It could also have been chosen because the water was relatively shallow at that point, so there would be easier access for people who needed to cross the river, perhaps to trade with nearby settlements. The earliest map of the area dates from 1584, but the original is lost, and there is only a later copy, which may not be reliable or accurate. However it does show the line of either a ford or stepping stones, both of which were in use until the end of the nineteenth century. The map also shows a weir, as documented in the deed from 1213. A further incentive, particularly relevant to this area, might have been that millstones could be quarried from nearby outcrops of millstone grit rock. In local woodlands there are unfinished or broken millstones still lying where they were being worked and were abandoned.

Little is recorded about Thackley during these early years. It was simply an unremarkable area within the Lordship of Idle. The map of 1584 shows buildings in Idle itself, and 'The Park' to the east, but the area now known as Thackley was mostly a Common, with the East and the West Wood stretching down to pasture land bordering the river. The only buildings shown are the mill with its wheel by the river and another small building nearby, probably a house. There were undoubtedly other dwellings around, but not significant enough to feature on a map.

About 70 years ago Wright Watson, the author of 'Idlethorp' wrote that until quite recently Thackley had *"remained much as Nature had made it, the few scattered aborigines wandered where they would to gather reeds and rushes with which to thatch or "thack" their primitive dwelling. It was thus that the stretch of waste or common land from which they obtained "thack" became known as the thack lea (or meadow) and eventually as Thackley."* And, apart from deeds conveying parcels of land, woodlands and fields from one wealthy family to another, there are few records of the life and work of ordinary people in Thackley.

One exception is the Poll Tax list of 1379. This was a census of all residents who paid four pence tax on their property, and is therefore only a list of the wealthier people of the Manor of Idle, but it does give an impression of the development of the area. In relation to the Mill, there were two relevant surnames, Milner and Webster. Horsfall Turner reprinted the Poll Tax list, and commented that *'Robert the Milner was most likely to have lived near Buck Mill, then known as Idle Mill, where besides the corn trade, there was almost certain to be woollen manufacture as well, and Richard Webster was the weaver.'*

The expansion of manorial corn mills to include textile processing was a practical and widespread arrangement, given that the corn mills had the machinery necessary to utilize water power, such as wheel pits, gears, and shafting to turn the stones. Crucially they were also often situated at fords or bridges where paths within a manor converged and linked with trade routes and markets elsewhere. Records of a court case in 1393 show that there was a medieval road called Idlegate, which came from Idle and crossed the Aire at Buck Mill, and then continuing along what is now Buck Mill Lane. There it connected in one direction with the road from Esholt, Guiseley, and beyond, and in the opposite direction with the road to Baildon village and over Baildon Moor to Bingley, which was an important medieval market town. From there the road continued into Wharfedale. Horsfall Turner wrote that *"at Buck Mill there was a ford, for crossing, for which a toll was charged, but foot passengers, until a dozen years ago [c1890] had to cross by the 'hippins' or stepping stones."* Precisely where and how this toll was collected isn't recorded, but traffic must have been significant enough to make the effort and administration worthwhile. However, by the mid 19th century there was no longer a charge at Buck Mill, although a toll was still charged at Shipley.

In an area where the wool trade was becoming established and expanding, these transport links would be especially advantageous. Just as corn milling had originally been undertaken by families at home with their quern stones, and had later become tied to the manorial corn mill, so textiles and weaving had originally been home-based, even before Roman times. Sheep farming became widespread from Norman times onwards, and became especially associated with the wealthy monasteries of the period. But the manufacture of wool textiles from these immense flocks of sheep continued to be a small scale cottage-based industry, and even the great monasteries subcontracted their textile production to their lay-brethren and the tenants on their lands.

SIDELINES: The Woollen Industry & Fulling

The first of the cloth-making processes to break away from cottage manufacturing was that of fulling.

Fulling, or scouring as it was also called, involved cleaning and pounding lengths of newly woven woollen cloth, to remove the dirt and grease. The cloth produced by the weavers on handlooms in their cottages began to be taken to the fulling mill for this cleaning to be done. The cloth

would be covered with substances such as fullers' earth, dung, urine, or potash, and this was 'walked' into the piece of cloth in tubs until all the foreign matter was removed, and the cloth was thickened and felted into a more regular texture. Initially this process took place by immersing the cloth in a tub and treading on it, but during the 13th century fulling stocks were introduced from Italy. This mechanised the process, which changed little until the 19th century. The fabric was pounded by wooden hammers, known as stocks, which pummelled and gathered the length of cloth into folds within a trough, achieving a more uniform end product than before.

IDLE MILL: Growth And Development

Describing the Idle area and its growth by the mid 16th century, Cudworth mentioned evidence of tanning and fell-mongering, which were traditional cottage industries dealing with animal hides. He also referred to Idle Mills with its corn mill, its kiln for drying grain, and the fulling mill with two stocks, and points out that *"Buck Mill had then to do service for a very extensive district."* The network of roads and paths, even though they included fords and stepping stones which might be hazardous at times, were clearly of great value to an increasing diversity of trades.

However, the emphasis on the growth of industry should be tempered by the viewpoint of the local historian Sidney Jackson, writing around fifty years ago, who said *"What a beautiful and secluded valley mid-Airedale must have been when in 1567 John and William Buck were granted a lease of the watermill later called after them at Thackley. There would then be no Leeds and Liverpool Canal, no railway, and probably only a narrow cart track from the little village of Shipley on to Esholt."*

1567 was a seminal date in the history of the mill. After that its growth can be judged from the many property deeds that relate to Idle Mills, when the land and buildings changed hands or attracted new tenants. These, and later newspaper advertisements for new tenants or for sales of goods and property, are a useful source for interpreting and understanding the life of the mill and its owners and workers.

In 1567 a lease for 60 years was granted by the owners to John and William Buck, sometimes spelt Bucke. This was the start of the Buck family's acquisition of the entire property, and Cudworth commented that *"The name of Buck occurs frequently in [the] town's documents up to 1780, showing that they were people of consideration in Idle for a long period."* The Buck family were the entrepreneurs of their time, and made concerted moves to acquire the freehold on all parts of the mill and land, hence the number of deeds, showing the complexity of land ownership in those days. A property, such as that which included the Idle mill, was not necessarily held in its entirety by one person or family, but was frequently held in moieties (which usually meant a half) or quarters. These belonged to people who were dealing in property and were concerned with money, not with developments that might benefit or provide for local people.

In 1584 a comprehensive survey of Idle was undertaken. The description of Idle Mills, held by John Bucke [sic] and his son William, included a house, a Water Corn Mill and a Fulling Mill, still with two stocks, *"standing on the river."* There were also gardens and a croft (an enclosed area used for arable farming close to the house), and substantial named fields principally below the woodland and alongside the river. A sale document five years later added more detail, listing buildings, barns, and stables, and dams, streams, goits, waters and watercourses.

A similar document in 1594 described the mill as consisting of "*one Corne Milne and one walke Mylne*"; the latter meant a fulling mill, where the workers 'walked' the fabric in the fulling stocks.

Until the 1630s there are few detailed descriptions of the mill itself, or its environs, in the many deeds concerning changes of ownership or tenancies of the buildings and land. The Buck family, however, continued in business there, presumably living in the house with its gardens, and its traffic of local people bringing their corn for grinding and their cloth to the mill for fulling. By the 1650s it appears that the Fulling Mill had doubled its size, was in two buildings, and had four fulling stocks. Later, in 1671 a will referred to "*the water Corn mill and two fulling mills called Buck Mills*," possibly the first time that the family name had appeared attached to the mill in an official document, and an acknowledgement of the commitment of the Buck family to making the mills a successful business, although the names 'Buck Mills' and 'Idle Mills' continued to be used interchangeably for many years.

Alongside the corn mill, which was still the local soke mill, and the fulling stocks which were providing a similar resource for the community, farming was clearly an additional important activity for the Buck family. The 1584 Survey mentions some farm buildings as do later documents. In 1710 an Upper Barn and a Lower Barn are specified, the latter with a threshing floor. There was also "*an eeling or Mystal*" which would house cattle or other farm stock. There were more than a dozen fields making up the land around the mills, the house and other buildings, as well as the woodlands providing timber, all belonging to the Bucks. Shortly after this, before 1720, there was some rebuilding and "*making an addition thereto of a new Corn Mill*" and "*ye old Mills did consist of one pair of Millstones in y^e Corn Mill only but one pair of stones then added to y^e Corn Mill & two other stones were formerly added to y^e said fulling Mill*," thus creating more capacity and presumably more efficiency for the clientele bringing their goods to Buck Mill.

However, by the 1730s the Bucks had left Idle, although the mill still belonged to them. They left it in the hands of a tenant, Edward Ackroyd. John Buck (senior) had settled in Gargrave, as a Gentleman, and John (junior) was in Bolton, Bradford. The Bucks had left at a time when change was in the air. For instance, more people were questioning the manorial soke system for grinding their harvested crops. It was a relic of the feudal system, and one which was inconvenient to those who could get their corn ground closer to their fields or farms; it was also a reminder of an outdated system which had kept the 'peasants' in their place, tied and indebted to the Lord of the Manor. But despite objections, and refusals by several local people to take their corn to Buck Mill, the soke charge appears to have continued to be applied. As late as December 1759 an advertisement for tenants for the land, and for the Mills and the House, specifically declared that "*The Corn-Mill has a large Soke belonging to it.*"

In 1744 the Bucks passed the entire property on to Walter Blackett and his father Sir Walter Calverley; Edward Ackroyd still occupied the main house as tenant. The full extent of this purchase of the mill and its surroundings was recorded [see below], and it differed from previous inventories in that "*One cottage or dwelling house*" was referred to, described as "*lately erected.*" This could have been for whoever farmed the adjoining land, or for another tenant of the mill. No named dwellings other than the Mill House feature on maps of the area around the mill and its buildings, although in the nineteenth century there would be more cottages mentioned in documents and shown on maps, and variously named in government censuses.

Lease and Re-lease of Idle Mills, and other related property, 29/30 October 1744

House near Idle Mills, occupied by Edward Ackroyd (tenant)

Upper Barn and Lower Barn

'one cottage or dwelling house there lately erected'

2 Water Corn Mills and 2 Fulling Mills with 4 stocks under one roof on the River Aire, near the house, called Idle Mills

Drying Kiln

Ground, stoneries, islands

Suit, soke etc.

Pieces, fans, arks, chests

Wheels, stocks, millstones, utensils

Dams, attachments of dams, water, watercourses etc.

Closes:

Kiln Close, Wailes Close, New Close, Two Days Work or Miln Close, Brow Close, Back of the Kiln, Sandal Ing, Ramsden Ing, Wade Close, Oddy Ing, 3 Smithy Closes, Bottom Close, Great Ing, Coat Close with a little laith or barn, Little Stubbing, Great Stubbing

Within a few years it was all resold, as part of the Manor of Idle, with other surrounding land and woodland, to Robert Stansfield, whose family were to continue in ownership until the early 20th century. The Stansfields had been organising their land holdings, and now held the entire Esholt Estate, which included Esholt Hall, and encompassed the Manors of Idle and of Yeadon. The agreement with Sir Walter Blackett also covered building new mills and rebuilding old ones, and also regulated the charges to be made for fulling cloth.

Rebuilding and extending the mill was evidently not something to be undertaken with haste. Small repairs were carried out, and a bill was paid for "one pair of blue Stones for Buck Mill" costing £20 in 1771, and two further pairs of millstones, costing £10 in 1781. But in 1794 the owner of the property, Ann Rookes, (born Stansfield, and widow of William Rookes, Lord of the Manor of Esholt Hall), commented that *"the said mill is very much out of repair and capable of very great improvement but at a very considerable expense."* She was leasing the property to her daughter and son-in-law, Joshua Crompton, for 99 years, and granted them the right to sell timber from part of the local woodland in order to pay for the repairs. Whilst allowing the existing tenants, the Walshaw family (whose time at the mill is referred to later), to continue to live and work there on a shorter lease, Crompton began refurbishing the out-dated mill. He installed eight new fulling stocks, building another floor above the fulling mill to be used as a Scribbling chamber, and built a new water wheel for the scribbling machinery alone. In addition he was to rebuild or alter the old Fulling Mill, to carry the eight fulling stocks, providing necessary wood, lime and stone, and the iron work with a pit wheel, fly wheel, upright shafts and tumbling shafts. The Corn Mill was to be kept in good repair with four pairs of working stones. The tenants were to work no more than eight fulling stocks in the Fulling Mill, or they would be charged extra rent, and were themselves to repair or provide *"Axle trees and stock bucks for the wheels"*.

With the addition of machinery for 'scribbling', Buck Mill can be seen as entering the modern world of increasing industrialisation of the woollen industry, as demand grew and one process after another became mechanised.

SIDELINES: Woolcombing, Scribbling & Carding

Manufacturing wool or worsted cloth was a complex process, and some stages of production took longer than others. To some extent the traditional cottage industry accommodated these differences; for example several members of a family, including children or even neighbours, could be employed in the slower occupation of spinning yarn to supply the faster process of weaving the yarn into cloth, which was predominantly carried out by men in well-lit upper storeys of the cottages. But it was not necessarily a pleasant way of life. Woolcombing was also carried out in homes; it was a basic process whereby wool fibres were straightened and separated to supply the long fibres needed for weaving worsted cloth. Metal combs were heated over charcoal burners, a process that generated noxious fumes, with serious long term effects on the health of families who had to live in overcrowded homes alongside the tools of the trade.

Scribbling and carding was another important preliminary stage of wool processing, and was one of the earliest to be mechanised. The machine was used for the first coarse teasing or carding of wool. As Wright Watson described it: *"The object of this process is to disentangle the confused mass of fibres of which it consists when the wool is first brought to the mill, place the fibres as nearly as possible in straight and parallel order, then collect them as they leave the machine into a continuous rope of wool called a sliver. At the same time all extraneous matter is removed - dirt, burrs or other vegetable matter, as well as short, broken fibres."* Carding and scribbling were essentially the same process, but scribbling gave a coarser result. It was common to build an extra floor for scribbling machinery above the fulling stocks, which were heavier and needed to be on the ground floor, and nearest the source of water power. This was the case at Buck Mill, where the machines were set up on the floor above the existing fulling machinery around the end of the eighteenth century.

BUCK MILL & THACKLEY: From Cottages To Mills And Machinery

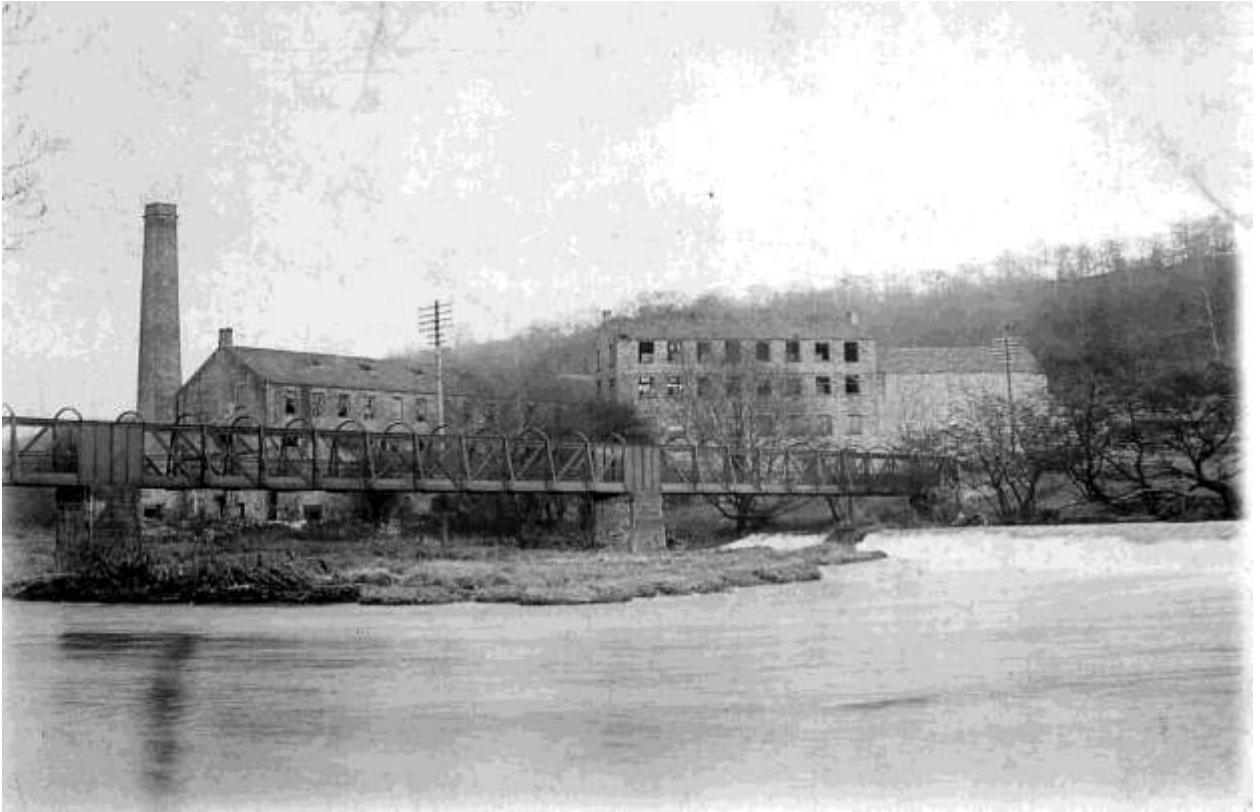
Following the same pattern of development as many other established mills, Buck Mill gradually expanded during the 19th century, installing the machines that would bring all the wool manufacturing processes on to one site, building and adapting as the new mechanisation (and sources of power) required. But even when all processes were automated there were still independent skilled weavers operating from looms in their cottages, who used the facilities of the mill, such as the fulling equipment, when they needed. Other weavers could be contracted to a clothier who supplied the wool and outsourced whatever other processes were still done by hand, as well as taking the woven pieces to the mill for fulling.

An authority on the medieval period has written that the clothier system flourished in the south of England (and that the clothiers were the ones who became wealthy), but that in the north there were more diverse schemes, and fewer clothiers running the trade. Consequently, in this area, the word 'clothier' was used for many different roles within the trade. This usage continued well into the 19th century and is evident in census entries from 1841 onwards.

Wright Watson used it when he commented on the different ways in which the wool trade continued to be organised in Idle and Thackley. Writing in the mid-20th century he recalled that there were *"plenty of the old clothiers' houses still left in Idle to show us where the weaving was done, and when I was very young there was still a hand loom or two in houses at the top of the Green"*.

Buck Mill benefitted from the network of canals being built as industrialisation and new towns changed the country from a largely rural to a manufacturing economy. In the 1760s plans were put forward for a canal to cross the north of the country, to connect Liverpool

Postcard views of the Mill and its surroundings



Buck Mill, the Footbridge, and the weir



Buck Mill, viewed from Buck Mill Lane

with Leeds. Although this wasn't completed until 1816, the section immediately above Buck Mill opened in the late 1770s. An agreement had already been made that the tenants of Buck Mill, Buck Mill Farm, and other local farms and mills adjoining the canal should have free access to the towing path from Buck Mill to what became Apperley Road *"for horses with saddle and horses loaded with cloth or corn to be milled or ground or for other uses at the Mills or Farms."*

The mill was still owned by the Stansfield family of Esholt. It was let out to tenants either as a single enterprise or in three separate units - corn-milling, fulling, and scribbling; there was also the farm. The combined scribbling and fulling mill was characteristic of woollen mills dating from before 1825, especially those which were originally corn mills. Mills built after that date generally included more, if not all textile, manufacturing processes under one roof; these were the extremely large mills which became a dominant feature of the textile industry in the Bradford area. The monumental mill complex at Saltaire, built in the 1850s, is a typical example.

Surviving documents and records from Buck Mill suggest that the system of letting either single parts or all of the mill together could be a risky business. The fortunes of the Walshaw family, mentioned earlier, demonstrate some of the difficulties that could arise.

In 1769 a miller from Calverley, William Greenwood, was granted a seven year lease of Buck Mill and the Farm. His lease was renewed and extended over the years, and it appears that he was sub-letting the property to the Walshaw family, while continuing with his own activities at Calverley Mill. The Walshaw name appeared in a document relating to Buck Mill dated 1781, when Peter Walshaw, presumably a son of the family, was refunded for the purchase of two pairs of millstones. In 1794 Greenwood's tenancy of Buck Mill was renewed jointly with Frances Walshaw, who was described as a widow already occupying the Mill. The repair and updating required in 1794 has been mentioned earlier, as well as the need to sell timber to raise money to repair the mill buildings.

There could be many reasons for the state into which the Mill had evidently fallen, but the renewal of the lease for 15 years suggests that the Lord of the Manor, now Joshua Crompton, had faith in the Walshaws to continue their tenancy. It must have been some relief to Mrs Walshaw, who had many responsibilities. According to Cudworth, *"the Walshaws were noted for their nine handsome daughters, four of whom lived to over eighty years of age..."*, adding that *"Mrs Walshaw carried on the mill for many years after the death of her husband."* But eventually the Walshaw family's time at Buck Mill ended; by November 1813 William Greenwood and Frances Walshaw were both dead. The Mill was occupied by Frances' sons Thomas and William Walshaw, and a one year lease was granted to Thomas, who was already working as a miller. However, an announcement in the Leeds Intelligencer in January 1816 declared that Thomas was bankrupt, and all his property was ordered to be sold for the benefit of his creditors.

"The Farming Stock and Household Furniture of the said Thomas Walshaw, with a large Quantity of Corn and Hay, and a great Variety of other Effects, (too numerous to particularize) will be Sold by Auction, at Buck Mill aforesaid..."

Then, in March 1816 the *"very Valuable and Well-accustomed SCRIBBLING MILL, FULLING MILL & CORN MILL"* were advertised in the same paper, to be let either as a whole or in parts.

In 1818 a new 10 year lease for the Corn Mill, house and land was drawn up with David Mellor, a corn miller, who unfortunately died in 1823. For a few years the number of

newspaper advertisements suggest that it was difficult to attract tenants. One possible reason could be that some leasing agreements included restrictions on the hours that water was available to power all the operations, as in this advertisement for tenants of the scribbling mill in the Leeds Mercury in 1819, which offered

"Two Large Chambers, each Twenty-six Yards long, and near Twelve Yards wide, with Nine Windows on each Side, placed at such Distances as to suit either Worsted or Woollen Machinery. Also, the sole and entire Use of a newly-erected Water-Wheel, of Eighteen Feet diameter, and Nine Feet wide, of Power far more than sufficient to carry any Machinery that the two rooms above-named will hold. This Water-Wheel will have the Command of the whole of the River Aire, from Seven o'Clock in the Morning, until Seven in the Evening, except when the water runs over the Dam-Stones; then the Corn-Mill, and Fulling-Mill will be allowed to Draw, but no longer."

It is likely that this issue led to the reservoir for storing water being constructed in the field across from the Mill, on the other side of Buck Mill Lane.

The advertisement also stated that *"Buck Mill is an excellent Situation for the Woollen-Business, and not less so for Worsted Spinning, as any number of Hands may be obtained from the immediate Neighbourhood, on reasonable Terms, many of whom are already acquainted with the Business."* This is perhaps an acknowledgment that the world around Buck Mill was changing, and that the mill was no longer so isolated from the community which it had served. But with its rural setting, and *"a good Dwelling-House, Barn and other Outbuildings, with Garden, and about Fourteen Acres of excellent Grass Land, all adjoining the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and the River Aire,"* it must have been a more attractive place than the big mills that were being built throughout Bradford and in neighbouring villages.

From 1825 to 1855 the years appear to have passed smoothly, although the disruption from building work and installations of machinery must have been frequent. In 1825, the Scribbling Mill was leased to William Craven, William Brear, and Thomas Craven the younger. The Cravens also took over the lease of the Corn and Fulling mills when the existing tenants left, and at some point they acquired the farm too. In White's Directory of 1853 William Craven, Corn Miller at Buck Mill, William Craven, Farmer at Buck Mill, and William Craven & Co, Scribbling and Fulling Millers were all listed. All appeared to be well, with three generations of the family managing the business. But, by the beginning of 1855 the Cravens had moved on to Dixon Mill in Shipley (later the site of Salt's Mill), and the Bradford Observer was advertising for sale

*VALUABLE WOOLLEN MACHINERY, FARMING
STOCK, &c., BUCK MILL, IDLE
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, by Mr. JAMES WHALLEY,
at Buck Mill, near the Railway Tunnel, Idle,*

A year later in 1856 another, unobtrusive, advertisement in the Observer offered *"To Be Let, the Cloth Mill at Buck-Mill near Idle, containing Seven Pairs of Fulling Stocks."*

In the wool trade, and within Thackley itself, there was increasing growth and competition during these middle decades of the 19th century. Not far from Buck Mill was Brackendale Mill. This was established around 1800, and had extended with a second building in 1829, which included an engine house and a water wheel. Later, in 1875, a steam-powered weaving shed was added, at some distance from the original buildings. By then Bowling Green Mill in Thackley had been established by a consortium of local master-clothiers. Outside Thackley

were the mills of Idle, Greengates, and Shipley, all attracting workers and experienced tenants like the Cravens.

In this context, Buck Mill was perhaps hampered by its awkwardly placed site and piecemeal development, and also by still being owned by the Lord of the Manor rather than by someone with practical expertise in the woollen industry. Unfortunately, these factors might have contributed to the eventual bankruptcy of the next occupants of the Fulling Mill, with its "Seven Pairs of Fulling Stocks". Between that 1856 advertisement and the beginning of the 1860s, a partnership of three local people, Mary Myers, Brook Tillotson, and James Cordingley set up as a Fulling Company at Buck Mill. The two men had experience of working in the wool industry, but Mary Myers, a widow in her 40s, and James Cordingley were both illiterate, signing their names on documents with a mark or a cross. In 1861 they were declared bankrupt, and their effects, which mostly consisted of small items such as carboys of ammonia, a quantity of soap, a writing desk, thirteen oak boards, as well as "*one yearling Foal by a noted horse*" and "*1 stack of well-won [sic] hay*" were auctioned for the benefit of their creditors.

In January 1863 another tenant of Buck Mill was obliged to sell his property, under a distraint for rent. James Murgatroyd would appear to have been leasing the rest of the mill apart from the fulling operation, although Jones's Mercantile Directory for 1863 described him as "Corn Miller and Grocer" at Buck Mill. The property sale was extensive and the list of machinery and other equipment, stated to be in first-rate condition, portrayed a flourishing well-equipped mill, with, amongst many other items, scribbling and carding machines of various sizes, twelve power and fourteen hand looms, and three tenter frames each 42 yards long, to stretch, shape and dry the finished lengths of cloth, heated by the steam piping which ran through the mill.

It's likely that the next tenants of the Mill, William and Benjamin Thornton, saw this sale as an ideal opportunity to extend their existing activities in the local textile industry. By August 1863 the Thorntons had already begun operations at the mill. They were named in a newspaper report as the owners of a length of cloth, stolen from a cart left unguarded outside Buck Mill late one evening, which indicates that they had moved in to the Mill and begun working extremely promptly. William and his son Benjamin had previously been cloth manufacturers in Eccleshill, and relocated from there to Thackley and Buck Mill.

In 1867 Benjamin Thornton applied to Idle Local Board for permission to add a warehouse to the buildings at Buck Mill, and two years later for a Willey room to be built: willeying was a process which prepared wool for carding, with machines that opened up or pulled apart the wool fibres. Both these plans were approved. However, in 1874 there was a fire at the mill, and the description of the buildings damaged by the fire suggest that the site was congested, and that the new warehouse was dangerously close to an existing boiler house and drying room where the fire started. Fortunately the fire was controlled by "*a small hand engine*" belonging to the mill, and by the Shipley fire engine. 140 stones of drying wool was lost, but fortunately the mill was insured, and the newly stored 500 to 600 bales of wool in the warehouse were saved.

After his father's death a few years later, Benjamin Thornton became owner and occupier of Bowling Green Mill, and successfully carried on business at both places until 1885 when the lease expired at Buck Mill. He then purchased Albion Mill at Greengates, where he could carry out dyeing and finishing, which meant he was in the position of supplying goods direct

to the market; the site of Buck Mill would not have had the space or transport connections for those activities.

Although the new buildings Thornton had constructed were part of the modernisation and mechanisation of the mill, he still employed some outside weavers in the Thackley community. In an interview in the Shipley Times many decades later, an elderly woman reminisced about her grandfather, who had five looms in his house, two in a bedchamber and three in the attic. He was given work by Mr Thornton of Buck Mill, and she also recalled that the finished pieces were laid out in the fields and grass verges to dry. William Cudworth, in 'Round about Bradford', described this traditional practice of 'tentering' outdoors *"if weather permitted"* which continued long after the machinery was installed in local factories. Tentering was the final stage, when the woven fabric was stretched and dried, preferably outdoors, on frames edged with 'tenterhooks' which held the cloth in shape whilst it dried.

In March 1885 the sale was announced of "The valuable Woollen Machinery and Trade Effects" at Buck Mill, following the termination of Benjamin Thornton's tenancy. The sale machinery all related to the processes of fulling, scouring, carding and so forth, but nothing concerned with weaving. Conceivably, the weaving machinery went with Thornton to one of his other mills.

Later, an advertisement in the Yorkshire Post in 1889 sought tenants for the vacant Buck Mill describing it as *"well adapted for almost any manufacturing business, will be let on an easy rental to a suitable tenant"*. However, there is little documentary evidence to show what was happening at the Mill after 1885. There were still people living on the premises and recorded on the Censuses, but none who would appear to be carrying on a business there. It might be assumed that some woollen industry processes were still carried out there, if only because of the frequency with which complaints were made about accumulations of offensively smelling refuse in the goit. Complaints began in the late 1860s, and concerned the debris from scribbling and fulling at the mill. The issue recurred in the early 1890s, when Baildon Local Board complained to Idle Local Board about *"the bad condition of the water in the wheel race at Buck Mill, and to the necessity for its being let off occasionally"*, which of course raised complaints elsewhere further downstream when the Idle Board agreed to regularly open a 'grip' or small trench to clear the unpleasant waste material and let it flow into the River Aire. But perhaps the smell was a result of stagnant water accumulating, rather than continued activity at the mill. The problem was only dealt with once and for all in 1907 when an Engineer was sent from Bradford's Sewage Committee, who by then owned the land, to *"dispose of the old shafting and wheels in Buck Mill, and to cut a grip for the purpose of clearing the Mill Goit."*

In 1893 the Ordnance Survey map of the area described the mill as 'Disused'. In 1889 the land had passed to the Idle Local Board, with plans that the site be used for a local Sewage Works. Later that year Idle itself became part of Bradford Corporation, and the local sewage plan was replaced by the much larger scheme centred on Esholt. Buck Mill was left to decay, and as early as 1890 a newspaper article describes the mill as *"going to rack and ruin."* But demolition didn't begin until 1918, and was not completed until the remaining buildings were blown up in 1923; most of the stonework was used elsewhere, with a small quantity used to surface part of Buck Mill Lane leading up to Thackley. The distinctive mill chimney, towering above the mounds of stone smothered with brambles, balsam, and ivy, was left standing, still shown on maps in the 1960s.

SIDELINES: The River And The Canal At Buck Mill: dangers and diversions

The River Aire and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal were important to Thackley people both for leisure and for work. The canal with its towpath was a direct route to Shipley and to Leeds, as well as villages such as Calverley, the location of the parish church for Idle until 1829. As noted earlier, the canal was built as a trade route; it was busy enough to merit a full-time lock-keeper at Field Locks, where there was a sizeable house and stabling for barge horses. Walking on the towpath may have been hazardous at times of bad weather or of heavy traffic, and accidental deaths were recorded. Some of these were linked to the nearby Canal Tavern, a short distance from Buck Mill towards Shipley. The Tavern faced directly on to the towpath, and it was not the best regulated drinking place as far as opening hours were concerned. Inquests could result in the jury returning a verdict such as *"Found drowned, there not being sufficient evidence to show how deceased got into the water,"* if no clear reason for a man's death in that stretch of the canal on a dark night or a foggy morning could be found.

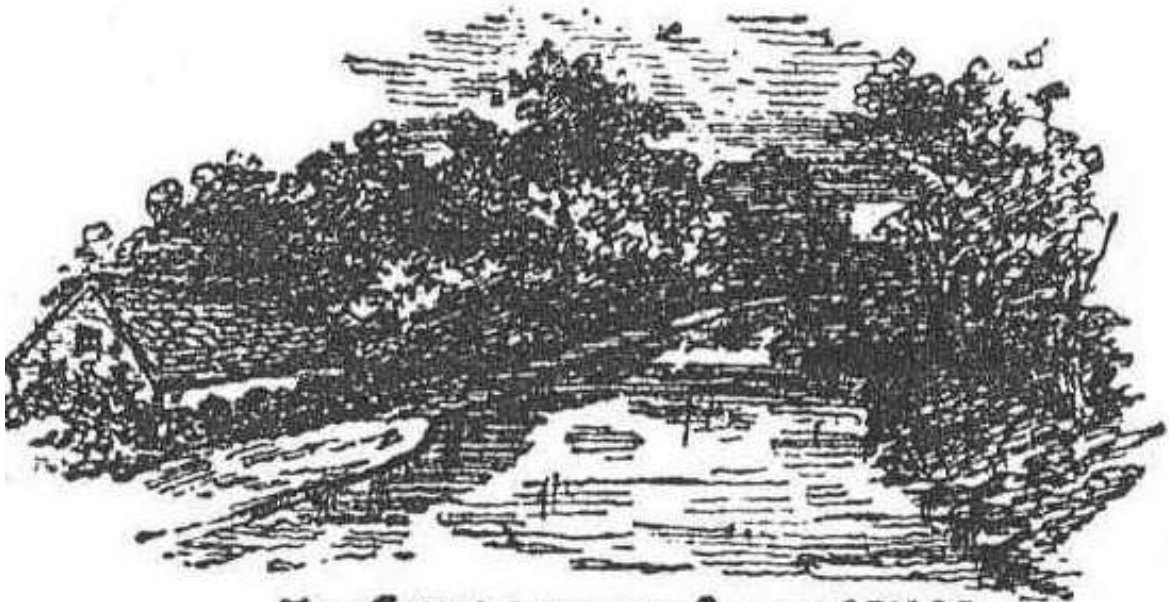
The river crossing, either by the ford or the stepping stones, was long established, as shown on the earliest map. During the debate about building a bridge in 1888 a writer to the Shipley Times also referred to an existing ferry boat service, which, he said *"has served the timid in years past,"* although it may not have been operating at or near Buck Mill where the bridge was planned. But any mode of crossing held its dangers. An incident was reported in the Leeds Intelligencer in 1770, which said that the body of a man, missing for six weeks after attempting to cross the river at Buck Mill had been found and *"decently interr'd,"* adding that *"The body of the other person who was lost at the same time, is not yet found."* In 1844 two brothers (and their horses) were drowned, trying to cross the river at night with wagons and horses when it was *"swollen by the heavy rains of the previous day and Saturday, was bank full, and running with great rapidity ... the elder, a headstrong fear-nothing young man, presuming that as he had crossed in safety before he would do so again, disregarded the counsel of his parent."*

But there were also advantages to having stepping-stones, as local children, perhaps in defiance of their parents, used them for playing. A comment in the Shipley Times in 1905 mentioned a traditional competitive sport, when Baildon boys went down to the 'ippings' and threw stones at the Idle boys who had assembled on the opposite side of the river. However, a correspondent from Idle to the Shipley paper in 1876, pointed out *"... the stepping-stones or 'hippings', as they are termed in local parlance, at Buck Mills, are in a very dilapidated and dangerous state. Never, perhaps, having been repaired for generations, they are sunk, worn, and shifted by the floods, until it is next to impossible for anyone but the young and active to pass over them without stumbling; and a slight freshet in the river rends it wholly impassable for pedestrians. Many are the stories told by those living in the immediate neighbourhood of little accidents of this kind, though fortunately very few fatalities are recorded ... scarcely a week passes but several casualties of this kind occur."* The correspondent suggests some new stones and repairs to many of the existing ones, and a handrail if possible, which would be cheaper than a footbridge or a stone bridge for vehicles. It was many years before any of these suggestions were acted upon.

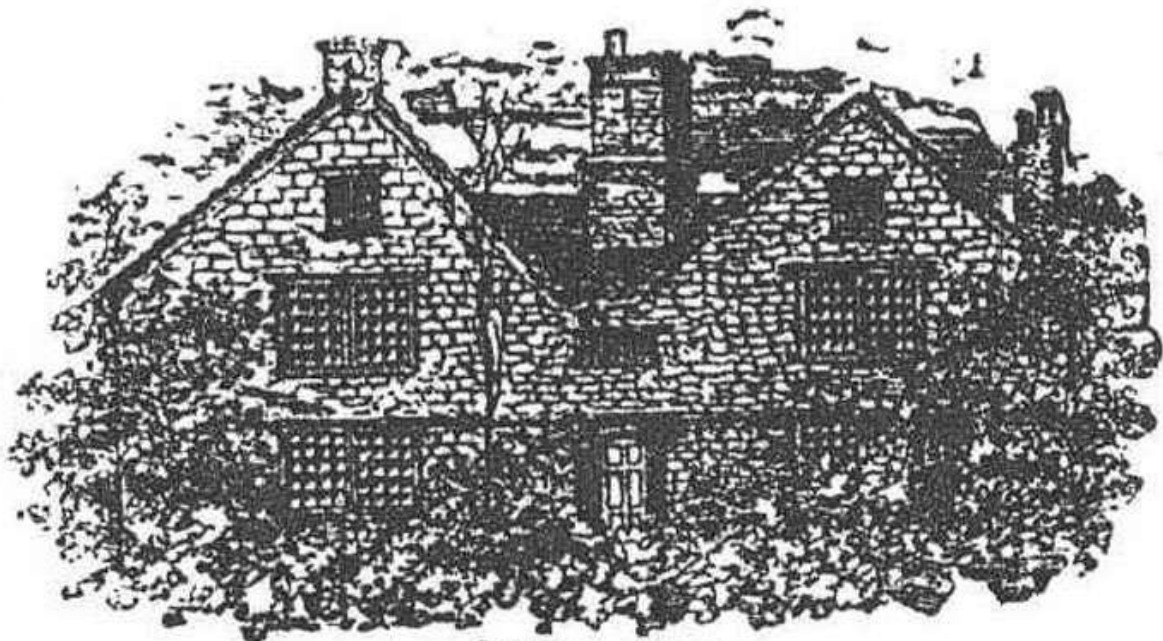
BUCK MILL: The House & Other Dwellings

Buck Mill House is repeatedly referred to in documents, but it is difficult to be certain about the existence or whereabouts of other houses or cottages in the immediate vicinity of Buck Mill. And Buck Mill House itself underwent alterations, as well as name changes; it was adapted to varying needs, unsurprisingly considering how many different tenants were there over the centuries.

Illustrations from a local newspaper article in 1890



THE CANAL FROM THE SWING BRIDGE.
NEAR BUCK MILL.



BUCK HALL

The first known map showing the mill in 1584 has a simply-drawn house nearby, and the Survey in the same year lists a *'House [messuage or tenement] near the River Aire'*, which signifies a dwelling house with some associated land. In 1620 there is also mention of a cottage in the East Wood (now known as Buck Wood) but there is no obvious evidence of such a building or its remains, either on maps or on the ground.

Shortly after that, in the 1630s, the new and impressive Buck Mill House was built. An article in the Shipley Times in 1915 made a story out of the building and its first inhabitants, based on the author finding the lintel from the front entrance of the house, which by that date was in ruins amidst the abandoned mill buildings. The lintel was carved with the initials W.B and M.B, and part of the date 'Anno Domini 163-'. The writer imagined a *'worthy couple'* having the house built, and conjectured that their names were William and Mary. His guess might have been correct, as early generations of the Buck family included more than one William and at least one Mary. The columnist was evidently impressed by the remains of the house, writing that *"A substantial house it has been, too. It was solidly built of hewn stone. The walls, seen partly standing, affirm their thickness to be two feet or more. The window frames, mullions, and inge nooks to correspond; also the door posts and a monstre [sic] lintel of carved stone. The beams to support the upper floors were equally strong, and of large girth, if the one or two still in evidence are a fair sample."* He also suggested that the house would have at its centre a banqueting hall, *"or, in other words, the large living room. Such a room was the main room of those dwellings."*

By 1658 the House was no longer a solitary dwelling near the mill; it was surrounded *"with barns, buildings, folds, gardens, closes, etc."* Some information about the internal arrangements of the House were given in a lease agreement in 1710, when John Buck the younger and his new wife agreed to share the House with his father, John Buck the elder, and his mother Mary. Within the house the parents had *"one ground room in the house called the Great Parlour and a chamber called the Men's Chamber;"* they also had *"liberty to brew and wash in a room called the Outkitchen, standing near the house [and] the south east end of the Lower Barn with use of the threshing floor [and] an eeling or Mystal adjoining the north east side of the south east end of the barn."* By the mid 18th century there were clear references to a farm as part of the assets of the Mill and its surroundings, rather than simply a collection of fields adjoining the site. In 1759 an advertisement in the Leeds Intelligencer referred to *"a large Quantity of Oak, Ash, Elm, and other Wood ... to be sold on the Farm,"* and ten years later a lease was arranged for *"Buck Mills and the Farm belonging."* In 1794 this is named as Buck Mill Farm, but there is no indication of an additional dwelling featuring on any maps, although there continued to be allusions to a farm in documents, as in the case of the Walshaws' sale in 1816 cited earlier, and a few years later in the case of David Mellor's short-lived tenancy, which included *"a barn, cowhouse, stable and pig-garth and pigcotes, closes of land [not named] – 37 acres, with appurtenances: outhouses, folds, yards, etc;"* but there is still nothing about a separate farmhouse.

These occasional references continue, but nothing clarifies the question of whether there was a dwelling for a farmer, who, in all probability would have had a family. In 1882 the Bradford Observer contained an advertisement for *"A Servant Girl, one who can milk preferred. Apply Mrs Popplewell, Buck Mill, Idle, near Leeds"*. Five years later, in the report of a criminal offence by some young men from Baildon, James Walker was described as a farmer living at Buck Mill, and was the owner of a pear tree which the young men had damaged.

However, there is evidence for some other cottages, very much later than the one fleetingly referred to in 1620. Some were built specifically for workers at the mill. In 1825 Joshua Crompton, Lord of the Manor, stated that he was intending to *"erect cottages on the premises at a cost of £100"*; this is probably the terrace of small dwellings that were built on the island in the river, and which can be seen on the Ordnance Survey maps thereafter.

The island was created when the goit for the mill was cut, making an artificial bypass flow of water which separated off a substantial area of land surrounded by water. On it were built some of the earliest mill buildings which needed the water wheel for power, and later the distinctive mill chimney. It was also partly covered by mature trees which were sold for timber near the beginning of the 19th century. Only when the mill fell out of use and the footbridge was constructed across the river did a new less stable island take shape, from the change in flow of the river around the stone supports of the bridge, and a build-up of silt which also began blocking the goit.

Not long after the island cottages were built, a pair of cottages with a view over the mill buildings and the valley were built, slightly above Buck Mill Lane, but they were not intended for the use of millworkers. They appeared first on a map of 1838; in the early twentieth century the two cottages were merged into one, known now as Buck Mill Cottage.

So, the existence of another cottage remains uncertain, although documents relating to the sale of the Esholt Estate in 1906 allude to another dwelling in the immediate area of the mill, but there is no further specific detail.

Not unexpectedly, there is little information about the people living in these houses or cottages, nor even, in the case of the island cottages, just how many dwellings were there. A rare mention by name in the local newspapers occurred when two women, Mrs Watson and Mrs Dawson, the wives of workers at the mill, discovered a fire at the mill one night in 1858. They *"not only immediately raised an alarm, but, by their energy and activity subsequently, rendered very effective aid in checking the flames which had made some progress. They reside on the premises adjoining the mill."* Other fires and incidents such as accidents and drownings when crossing the stepping stones or ford appear not to have involved workers or their family members.

The national ten-yearly censuses, which began in 1841, provide an array of information about the residents. Unfortunately, in each census there were different titles given to the dwellings, so it is rarely easy to tell who was living where, except in the case of some of the tenants who featured in other documents such as leases.

'Abodes,' or addresses, as recorded by census takers between 1841 and 1911 included these variants: Buck Mill, Buckmill, Buck Hill, Buck Bank or Buck Mill Bank, Buck Mill Farm, Buck Wood, or Buck Wood House. The total number of people living at these addresses while the mill was in use ranged from fifty-one in 1861 to seventeen in 1881.

The 1861 census illustrates the issues that can arise when attempting to decipher the censuses. There were eight families, each of them listed as living at 'Buck Mill.' The tenants of the Fulling Mill itself, mentioned earlier, were Brook Tillotson (with nine children), Mary Myers (a widow with two children), and James Cordingley (with three children). Apart from Buck Mill House itself it seems unlikely that there was accommodation for large families, but one of the other families in 1861 had eleven children. Almost all those of working age were employed as textile workers in a variety of jobs, presumably working in Buck Mill itself, with a range of jobs such as overlooker, mule spinner, slubber and cotton warp drawer.

The exception, with only one family member working in textiles, was the Popplewell family, who were tenants of the farm, but were also listed as residing in Buck Mill. Their farmland was, according to the Esholt Estate map of 1861, an extensive field to the south-west of Buck Mill Lane between the canal and the river, and a further large area north-eastwards, separated from the mill by woodland and fields. Neither area had a dwelling built on the land, although there was a small shelter or similar in the farmland to the north-east. Ann Popplewell, a widow and head of family was forty-four in 1861, and listed as a "Farmer of 50 acres". She had five children, three of whom worked on the farm, and a Farm Servant. Ten years later the family's home was listed as Buckmill [sic] Farm, but in 1881 Buck Mill was again named as their address, with only Mrs Popplewell, one son, a General Servant and a Farm Servant. They were no longer there in 1891.

Ann Popplewell was unusual in that, although born in Idle, she had not lived there all her life; her older children had been born in Bingley and in Hawksworth. In the earlier censuses it is noticeable how few people had moved from their place of birth, especially those who worked in textiles; presumably there would have been plenty of work close to home. Bradford was notorious for its phenomenal growth, based almost exclusively on wool, and the surrounding hamlets likewise expanded throughout the nineteenth century. Pigot's Trade Directory of 1834 listed seventy-one Woollen Cloth Manufacturers in Idle as a whole. Many of those 'Manufacturers' at that date would have been part of the old family-based unmechanised cottage industry, but the numbers indicate how the area was dominated by textile production.

As the century progressed more people settled in Idle and Thackley from elsewhere, predominantly from Yorkshire, but of course there were influxes of workers from further afield, when, for example, railway tunnels and roads were built, and when quarrying was a major local industry.

By 1871 there were many new occupations listed in the census for the wider area of Thackley, not just immediately around Buck Mill. Tradesmen and services predominated: a butcher, a laundress, a plumber and a grocer and druggist, for example. But there were also still traditional textile workers, and in a small area still noted today for its 'weavers' cottages' there was obvious overcrowding with large families, as, for example, a family of eight, all of whom, including an eight year old girl, were listed as woollen weavers.

At Buck Mill in 1871 all the working adult residents (except for the farming Popplewells) were still employed in textiles. The heads of two families were Cloth Fullers, who could perhaps have been tenants of the Fulling Mill, whilst another head of a family described himself as an Overlooker and another as a Woollen Factory-hand. Listed immediately after the census entries for Buck Mill were those for Bowling Green House. Amos Raistrick was head of the list, proudly describing himself as "Woollen Manufacturer: Employs 122 men, 51 boys & 39 girls".

In 1881 there were still three families involved in the woollen industry at Buck Mill. But ten years later in 1891 there was one family named as living at Buck Wood, their father described as a Coachman born in Northamptonshire, and their mother a Housekeeper, born in London, with only their three youngest children born locally. The remaining residents, a young couple also listed as living at Buck Mill, were described as a Farmer and his wife whose work was "Domestic Duties".

The censuses for 1901 and 1911 show plainly that the mill was no longer active. Although there were people cited as living in Buck Wood House in 1901, it's uncertain whether the

head of the family was earning his living from wool: Alfred Windsor described his job as an "Electric Engine Man". In 1911 William Hudson called himself a "Mechanic Labourer". On his census form he wrote his address as Buck Wood, Thackley, and described it as a five-room dwelling; other evidence shows that this was Buck Wood Cottage, which had been altered to a single dwelling after it was sold as part of Esholt Estate in 1906.

But by 1918, when the demolition began, only some outlines of house walls and features of the house such as the lintel over the door were to be seen. There was no mention of the cottages on the island, which were listed as unoccupied when the Esholt Estate was sold. As demolition of the site began, the Bradford Weekly Telegraph, beneath a picture of the buildings under volcanic clouds of dust, commented that

"One of the oldest landmarks ... is fast disappearing. We refer to Buck Mill, which is being pulled down by Corporation work men. No doubt the wall stones, which are said to be of fine quality, are valuable today. Buck Mill goes back to the times of the early mill masters and probably was one of the first structures of its kind in the Bradford district. "

Since then, of course, both the Bowling Green Mill and the Brackendale Mills have also disappeared from Thackley, and their land has been built on for housing developments. Buck Mill, situated so close to the River Aire, is still not connected by road directly with Baildon and the rest of the Aire Valley. This may eventually have had an adverse effect on the mill and its textile processing, but that and the relative inaccessibility of the site have perhaps saved it from being built upon for housing or other developments. Hence, all the past industrial activities and the people who worked and lived there are mostly forgotten, and instead there is a largely undisturbed green haven for nature to flourish, with little to remind passers-by of its importance to the early development of Thackley.

CHRONOLOGICAL SERIES OF MAPS

These twelve maps show the growth and decline of the Mill, and also demonstrate how the River Aire has been altered by its use as a source of power. Later changes occurred once the mill and its goit were disused, and the building of the footbridge also affected the flow of the river

1584: Copy of the missing '1584 Survey of Idle' map

1774: Jeffereys Survey of Yorkshire

1814: Field Survey of Idle

1826: Map of the Leeds to Liverpool Canal

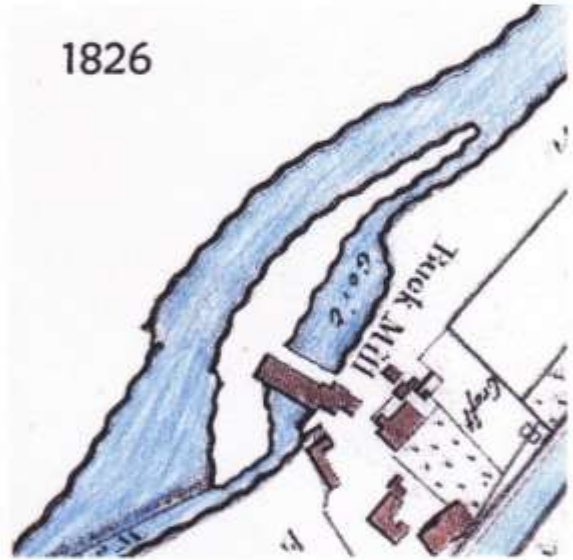
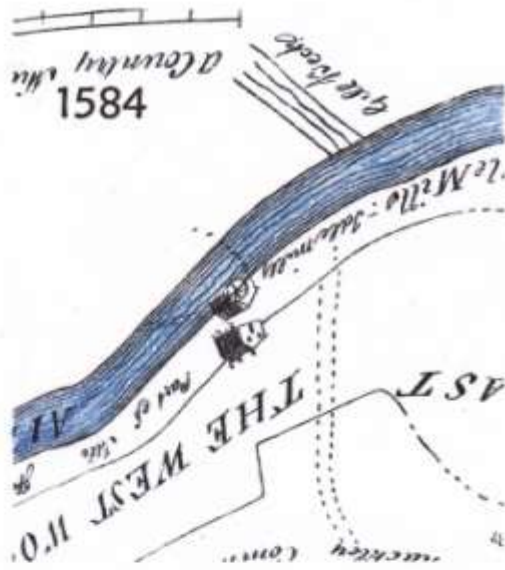
1838: Map of the Township of Idle

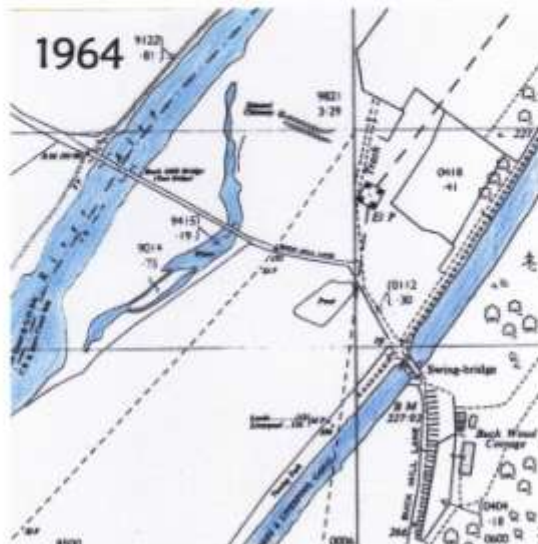
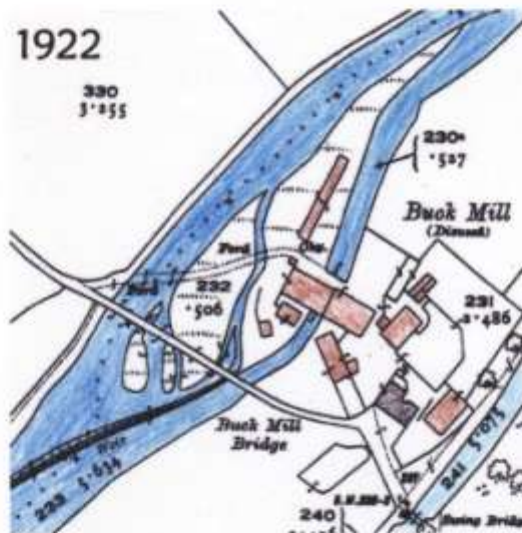
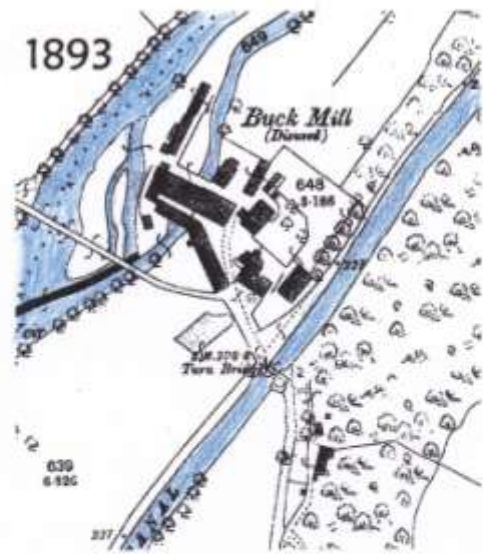
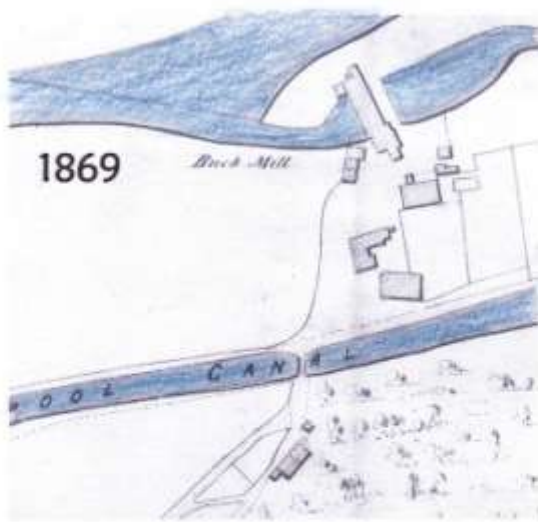
1851: Ordnance Survey map (1st edition)

1869: Map used in a local legal dispute over water supplies

1893, 1922, 1934, 1964: Ordnance Survey maps

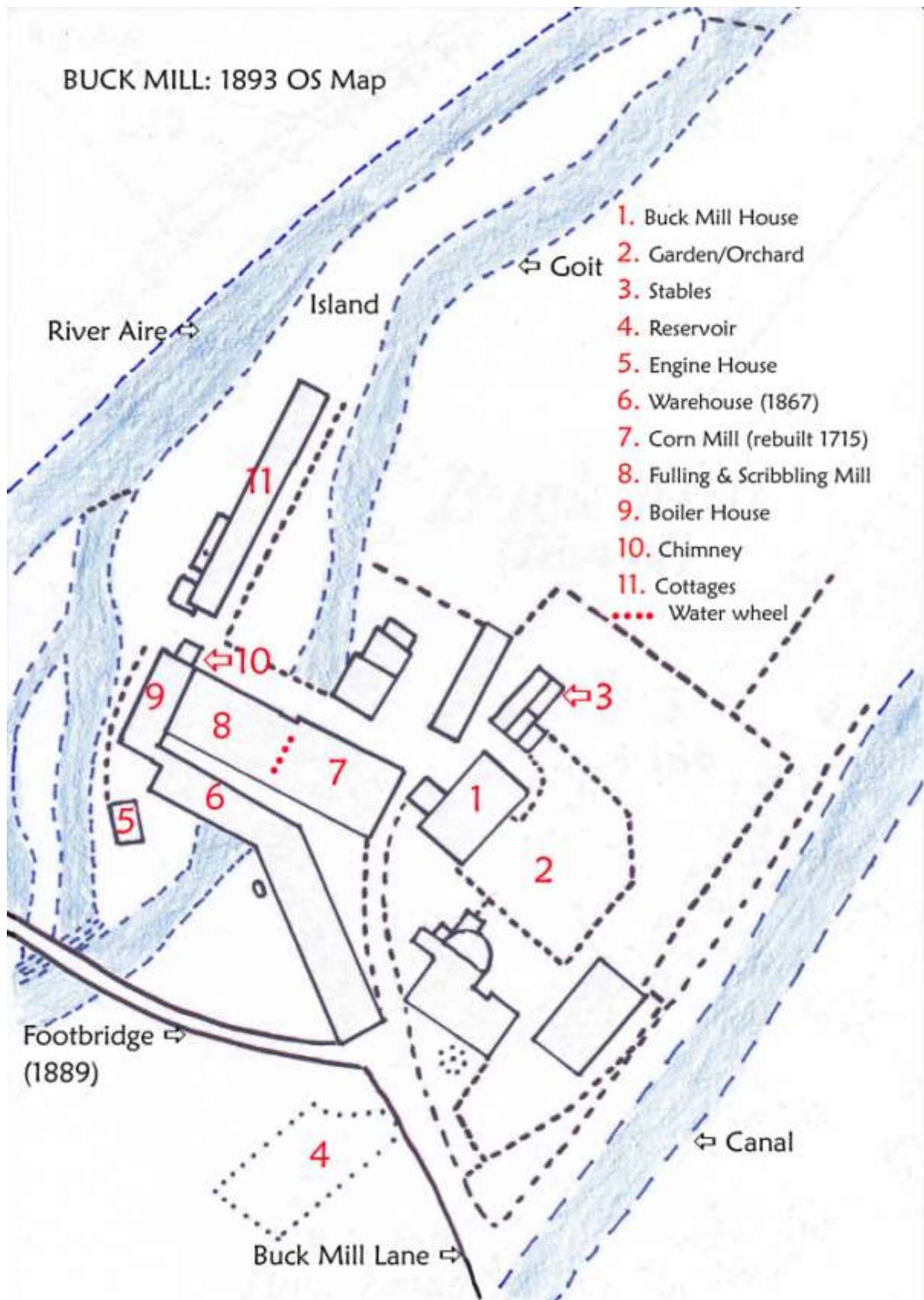
2005: Plan of Service Lines, Land Boundaries etc.





THE PLAN OF THE MILL

With the object of identifying the position of the buildings of the Buck Mill site, the Ordnance Survey map of 1893 was selected as being the last map to show all the buildings before they began to be demolished. Working with a miscellaneous series of maps dating from 1594 onwards, as well as later photographs and drawings, and from the text of various newspaper advertisements, archived lease documents and occasional newspaper reports, it has been possible to name some buildings with a degree of certainty, but some are more speculative. Over the centuries of the active life of Buck Mill, buildings have changed their use, and have been adapted or rebuilt according to changing circumstances, and to mechanisation and modernisation. Even the Ordnance Survey maps were unable to keep up with some of these changes, and there were undoubtedly buildings for which there were no records.



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West Yorkshire Archives, Bradford: Various maps and Papers from the Esholt Estate, Local Board Minutes, etc
 Bradford Local Studies Library: Directories, Electoral Rolls, etc.
 Calverley Information Online: Censuses transcribed from 1841 to 1901, and other items related to Idle and Thackley

With thanks to the staff of Local Studies and West Yorkshire Archives, Bradford for all their help, and to Dr Eileen White for making her research available via the aforementioned Buck Wood Archaeological Report, thus making access to the original documents much easier.